EDITORIAL

Conrad as a Reporter.

A GOOD reporter sometimes makes a good novelist and a great novelist sometimes becomes a good reporter. Nothing has been more interesting than the varying success with which English and French authors of distinction have attempted to do their bit by writing about the war in its multiform aspects. The best artist has generally, when he had a story at first hand to relate, kept himself sedulously in the background and let the story spin itself in the words in which he heard it.

A fine example of good reporting is furnished by JOSEPH CONRAD, writing in an English newspaper about the experience of the crew of a steamship which was torpedoed. CONRAD gives the tale as it was told him by the chief engineer, and the inner quotations enclose the engineer's own words. The vessel, after bunkering at Lerwick, left for Iceland:

"The weather was cold, the sea pretty rough, with a stiff head wind. All went well till next day, about 1:30 P. M., the captain sighted a suspicious object far away to starboard. Speed was increased at once to close in with the Faroes and good lookouts were set fore and aft. Nothing further was seen of the suspicious object, but about 3:30 without any warning the ship was struck amidships by a torpedo which exploded in the bunkers. None of the crew was injured by the explosion, and all hands, without exception, behaved admirably.

In the Lifeboat.

"The chief officer with his watch managed to lower the No. 3 boat. Two other boats had been shattered by the explosion, and though another lifeboat was cleared and ready there was no time to lower it, and 'some of us jumped while others were washed overboard.' Meantime the captain had been busy handing lifebelts to the men and cheering them up with words and smiles, with no thought of his own safety.' The ship went down in less than four minutes. The captain was the last man on board, going down with her, and was sucked under. On coming up he was caught under an upturned boat to which five hands were clinging. 'One lifeboat,' says the chief engineer, 'which was floating empty in the distance was cleverly manœuvred to our assistance by the steward, who swam off to her pluckily. Our next endeavor was to release the captain, who was entangled under the boat. As it was impossible to right her, we set to split her side open with the boat hook, because by awful bad luck the head of the axe we had flew off at the first blow and was lost. The work took thirty minutes and the extricated captain was in a pitiable condition, being badly bruised and having swallowed a lot of salt water. He was unconscious. While at that work the submarine came to the surface quite close and made a complete circle round us, the seven men which we counted on the conning tower laughing at our efforts.

The Men Saved.

"'There were eighteen of us saved. I deeply regret the loss of the chief officer, a fine fellow and a kind shipmate, showing splendid promise. The other men lost—one A. B., one greaser and two firemen—were quiet, conscientious, good fellows.'

"With no restoratives in the boat, they endeavored to bring the captain round by means of massage. Meantime the oars were got out in order to reach the Faroes, which were about thirty miles dead to windward, but after about nine hours hard work they had to desist, and, putting out the sea anchor, they took shelter under the canvas boat cover from the cold wind and torrential rain. Says the narrator: 'We were all very wet and miserable, and decided to have two biscuits all round. The effects of this and being under the shelter of the canvas warmed us up and made us feel pretty well contented. At about sunrise the captain showed signs of recovery, and by the time the sun was up he was looking a lot better, much to our relief.'

The Struggle.

"After being informed of what had been done the revived captain 'dropped a bombshell in our midst' by proposing to make for the Shetlands, which were *only* 150 miles off. 'The wind is in our favor,' he said. 'I will take you there. Are you all willing?' This, comments the chief engineer, 'from a man who but a few hours previous had been hauled back from the grave!' The captain's confident manner inspired them, and they all agreed. Under the best possible conditions a boat run of 150 miles in the North Atlantic and in winter weather would have been a feat of no mean merit, but in the circumstances it required a man of uncommon nerve and skill to make such a proposal. With an oar for a mast and the boat cover cut down for a sail they started on their dangerous journey, with the boat compass and the stars for their guide. The captain's undaunted serenity buoyed them all up against despondency. He told them what point he was making for. It was Ronas Hill—'and we struck it as straight as a die.'

"The chief engineer commends also the ship steward for the manner in which he made the little food they had last, the cheery spirit he manifested and the great help he was to the captain by keeping the men in good humor. That trusty man had 'his hands cruelly chafed with the rowing, but it never damped his spirits.'

"They made Ronas Hill (as straight as a die), and the chief engineer cannot express the feeling of gratitude and relief they all experienced when they set their feet on the shore. He praises the unbounded kindness of the people in Hillswick. 'It seemed to us all like *Paradise Regained*,' he says, concluding his letter with the words:

"'And there was our captain, just his usual self, as if nothing had happened, as if bringing the boat that hazardous journey and being the means of saving eighteen souls was to him an every day occurrence.'"

Conrad's Comment.

CONRAD adds a single sentence of comment:

"Such is the chief engineer's testimony to the continuity of the old tradition of the sea, which, made by the work of men, has in its turn created for them their simple ideal of conduct."

The Novelists' Nine.

WRITING as a low brow, though the slope of his roof is no steeper than our own, DAMON RUNYON tears to pieces the baseball club of American writers hastily organized on this page a short time ago in a reactionary mood induced by the mumps and a rainy day. And writing as a gentleman and a poet CHRISTOPHER MORLEY does the same thing. Out of the wreck we rise cheerfully to confess that our American outfit was far from being sure of the pennant. At the same time, or immediately afterward, we have to observe that in our hitherto uncelebrated opinion Messrs. RUNYON and MORLEY are fine wreckers, but weak, exceedingly weak, on the constructive side.

We made one mistake in announcing our club. We had in mind only novelists, or writers whose principal work has been novels, and failed to say so. Both our critics allow that our English nine was not so bad; which merely proves how easy it is to organize an English nine. Both suggest BARRIE and SHAW. Well, the only reason BARRIE and SHAW were not in our lineup was because they are playwrights—yes, even the author of *The Little Minister*. RUNYON wants W. W. JACOBS in the infield. For a couple of innings, yes. For a whole game, no. MORLEY would have us substitute HILAIRE BELLOC for H. G. WELLS as pitcher and GILBERT MURRAY for G. K. CHESTERTON behind the plate. BELLOC and MURRAY are fine players, but does MURRAY understand BELLOC'S signals? MORLEY passes GALSWORTHY to the bench and puts CHESTERTON on third; he also substitutes E. V. LUCAS for REBECCA WEST.

Remaking the All American.

This is RUNYON'S American club: TARKINGTON, pitcher; HARRY LEON WILSON, catcher; ERNEST POOLE, first base; WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE, second base; RUPERT HUGHES, third base; MARY ROBERTS RINEHART, shortstop; REX BEACH, WINSTON CHURCHILL, IRVIN COBB, fielders, with COBB in the centre. Utility man, DON MARQUIS. On the bench, DANA BURNET, DANA GATLIN, CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, CHARLES VAN LOAN, RING LARDNER, FRANK CONDON, JULIAN STREET and JOHN TAINTOR FOOTE. Manager, GEORGE HORACE LORIMER; coach, FINLEY PETER DUNNE; chief of scouting staff or head of the business department, OWEN WISTER. Members of the National Commission of the Literati League: WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS, chairman; ROBERT H. DAVIS and ANNA KATHARINE GREEN.

MORLEY nominates the following: TARKINGTON, pitcher; AMY LOWELL, catcher; DON MARQUIS, first base; VACHEL LINDSAY, second base; MARGARET DELAND, third base; SIMEON STRUNSKY, shortstop; IRVIN COBB, T. A. DALY and ED HOWE, fielders. EDGAR LEE MASTERS, manager, and MARY ROBERTS RINEHART, coach.

Our unspecified restriction to novelists would not impair RUNYON'S club except to take a few persons off his bench, but it would work havoc with MORLEY'S selections. If the fans insist the restriction is hereby declared off. The main thing of the whole business is to show what a wealth of material there is in America for the All American club. If we had the time and if we didn't hate to make the rest of this page resemble *Who's Who in America* with the biographies left out we could compile a list of from fifty to seventy-five living American writers who have done one or more books of real merit—yes, "literary" merit. Possibly because of our ignorance we couldn't compile an English list of anywhere near such length.

In the literary Baedeker Great Britain has more double starred personages than we, but there will be a new Baedeker after the war. Only it won't be a Baedeker; it will probably be diligently edited by WOODROW ROOSEVELT MCGILLIGAN at Akron, Ohio.

English Soldier Poets.

NO apology is necessary, we think, for devoting our page of verse this week to poems selected from a new anthology just published in this country by the Frederick A. Stokes Company under the title *The Muse in Arms*. It is, as the subtitle explains, "a collection of war poems, for the most part written in the field of action, by seamen, soldiers and flying men who are serving or have served in the great war." The book is edited by E. B. OSBORN, who writes an introduction in which he points out that no war of history has been accompanied by such an efflorescence of poetry of a high order of merit. "Even the long agony of the Napoleonic wars, so fertile in picturesque episodes . . . gave us only two or three poems by soldier poets."

Mr. OSBORN laments the vogue of the music hall song among the fighting men and of Cockneyese among the writers of soldier verse. Were it not for these two "malign influences" he thinks the war might have given us a few English marching songs equal in power and freshness to those born of the American civil war. He speaks despairingly of the popularity at the front of a "Salvation Army ditty" not unknown to American college undergraduates:

> The bells of Hell ring ting-a-ling a ling
> For you, but not for me.

He refers with lovely sarcasm to the efforts of civilian verse makers. "When this war began, the latter had a tremendous innings; the number of high explosive canticles they produced is past counting, and no living critic can read a tithe of them." There was then much validity in Mr. DOOLEY'S complaint that "concealed batteries iv poets" had added a new terror to warfare.

The outstanding fact in any collection of English war verse, however, is the absence of an Anglo-Saxon *Hymn of Hate*.

No Hindenburg Epic.

As for German soldier poets there appear to have been hardly any. "HINDENBURG . . . has not inspired a single soldier-poet." Such soldier verse as the German newspapers have printed has been pretty rhetorical, "noisy rather than strong." Another notable feature of English soldier verse is the absence of what might be called professional patriotism. Yet the English soldier has voiced memorably his love of country—the genuine, generally inarticulate, boundless devotion that underlies the English character. It is in RUPERT BROOKE'S famous sonnet:

> If I should die, think only this of me:
> That there's some corner of a foreign field
> That is for ever England.

It is just as superbly present in Lieutenant ROBERT NICHOLS'S *At the Wars*, of which these are the closing lines:

> The gorse upon the twilit down,
> The English loam so sunset brown,
> The bowed pines and the sheep bells' clamor,
> The wet, lit lane and the yellow-hammer,
> The orchard and the chaffinch song
> Only to the Brave belong,
> And he shall lose their joy for aye
> If their price he cannot pay.
> Who shall find them dearer far
> Enriched by blood aft er long war.

And the price of these dear, homely scenes is that a man shall be willing to lay down his life, if need be, to preserve them.

The selection we present from *The Muse in Arms* is imperfect, of that we are conscious. The volume itself does not pretend to perfection as an anthology of English war verse. This is partly the result of incompletion; Mr. OSBORN hopes to add to it later. If it serves by its tastings to attract readers to the books of poems by such men as SASSOON, ROBERT NICHOLS, ROBERT GRAVES and PATRICK MACGILL it will have done a good work. ARNOLD BENNETT was not wrong when he told the readers of *Books and the Book World* that the work of the fighter poets was the distinguished literary event of the past year.